

# EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN HOMILETIC MAGAZINE.

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VOL. VI.

MAY, 1908.

No. 5.

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## Sermon on the Gospel for the Second Sunday after Easter.

JOHN 10, 10—16.

In the Holy Scriptures different offices are represented under the simile of a shepherd. Preachers and teachers are called shepherds, because they render men entrusted to their care a service similar to that rendered by shepherds to their sheep. They feed and lead their hearers, spiritually, with doctrine, reproof, comfort, and exhortation. Kings and princes are called shepherds, because they care for the bodily welfare of their subjects, similarly as shepherds care for the well-being of their sheep. However, besides this, we find other passages in the Scriptures which speak of a particular, an only shepherd, who is a shepherd in a manner and in a measure such as no others are nor can be. Of this shepherd David sings in the 23d Psalm, and he sets forth wondrous things concerning him. He says, his shepherd provides for him in such a manner that he wants nothing. Under his care he has nothing to fear, even in distress and death. The 80th Psalm also speaks of him, and the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel prophesy concerning him that he would come and search his flock, and would deliver and feed them. And obviously the Apostle Peter has this wonderful shepherd in mind when, in the Epistle-lesson of to-day, he writes to the Christians: "Ye were as sheep going astray . . . of your souls."

Now who is this shepherd? "*The Lord* is my shepherd," we read in one place. In Ezekiel it is the Lord who announces His coming as that of a shepherd. At the same time He is called the "Servant David." This applies to the one wonderful person only who is God and man. It is Jesus Christ. Indeed, this He certifies in to-day's Gospel-lesson by saying of Himself: "I am the Good Shepherd." With these words Jesus declares Himself that one shepherd whom the prophets praise so highly, to whom, in fact, they credit the entire salvation of man. And not only does He say this, but to the joy and comfort of all poor sinners who desire to be saved He also proves Himself to be the Good Shepherd. And how does He do this?

## HOW DOES JESUS PROVE HIMSELF TO BE THE GOOD SHEPHERD?

He Himself gives a threefold proof in our text:

1. *He gives His life for the sheep.*
2. *He knows His own, and is known by them.*
3. *He also brings the dispersed sheep to His fold.*

### 1.

Christians are blessed people. Any one that knows in what relation they stand to God must pronounce them happy. They are loved by God, they enjoy His good pleasure, and He provides the best for them. They pray to Him, they confide to Him all their concerns, and they are assured that He hears them. Even in death they count on Him, confidently believing that He will deliver them from death and take them into His blessed abode in heaven. What is the cause of this happy state of the Christians? Has it always been that way with them? Is this their natural state? Were they born into this relation? Oh, were we to recite what Scripture says concerning the natural condition of all men, dreadful things would be told, *e. g.*: "We were by nature *children of wrath*." God's wrath was kindled against us, as against the first world, which He destroyed because of it. Whenever God looked on the conduct of men, He found nothing good. If He looked on their heart, it was evil in all its imaginations from their youth. If He looked on their understanding, it was darkened through sin, so that they did not know God and His will. They were as distant from faith and love and godliness as the dead are from life. To illustrate this condition, it might be said that men were like sheep that have lost their shepherd and are helplessly gone astray in the desert. The wolf is about to tear them.—How, then, did they become changed? How is it that we no longer are lost sheep, creatures fallen prey to death and the devil, but are God's dear children? A helper and deliverer was found, a shepherd for the lost and forsaken sheep. This shepherd is Jesus Christ. He is come and has said: I am the Good Shepherd of the sheep, their legitimate shepherd, for the sheep are my own. And I will search for my sheep, and will deliver them. And He has kept what He has promised. He has proved Himself the Good Shepherd.

But how did He prove it? He says: "The Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep." "And I lay down my life for the sheep." The Lord declares with emphasis that He is not a hireling. What is a hireling? A man hired for wages to watch another man's sheep. Such a hired shepherd may be properly attentive to his service, may endure frost and heat, and may even risk a fight for the sheep entrusted to his care. But when he sees the wolf coming, when his life



is in danger, he looks to his own safety and forsakes the flock. He does not take as much interest in the sheep as the man who owns the sheep. — Jesus is not such a hireling. He is the Lord, the owner of the whole flock of humankind, and He ventures all to save His own.

Many others have attempted to be such deliverers and saviors of mankind, as, recently, Dowie, the false prophet, in Chicago, and the notorious Mrs. Eddy, with her Christian Science, so called. He who invents a doctrine or religion other than the Gospel of Christ pretends to be a deliverer or savior of mankind. But all who follow them are deceived. And if Jesus were not come, all mankind would remain eternally lost. Yes, *if there were no wolf!* If men were not sinners, and under the curse, and in the power of Satan and death! But now the task is not merely to invent a new doctrine, but to slay the wolf. Now the requirement is to make satisfaction for the sins of mankind, to reconcile God, to destroy the power of Satan, to conquer death. What, then, becomes of all the pretended saviors? Many want Moses to be their shepherd and deliverer. That is, they think, in order to be saved, we have the commandments, and know what is right and wrong. If a person does according to them, as much as he can, he will be saved. Others take Mohammed for their instructor; others, again, the Romish pope, and still others want to be their own shepherds. They know what they have to do, and are not in need of anyone's advice. But how far do they all get with their shepherds and saviors? When sin torments conscience, when the devil demands the soul, when death and judgment prove their power, they all must flee. Against these enemies of our soul but *one* has held His ground, Jesus Christ. He was stronger than the wolf. Indeed, He had to risk the utmost. He gave up His life. But thereby He has also conquered the wolf, and saved the sheep.

Behold, thus Jesus has proved that He alone is the true Shepherd and Savior of mankind. He is not a shepherd in the same sense as the prophets and preachers. They are, indeed, called by Him to feed and lead the sheep, but they cannot save them from the wolf, cannot redeem them from sin. They understand Christ's office as a Shepherd poorly who think He only taught and fed the sheep. Again, He is not a shepherd like David and Hezekiah were. How could He have prevailed against sin and death if He had been a worldly prince? Nor do they have a correct knowledge of Christ who think that by civil laws Christ's kingdom could be built and men be brought to Christ and saved. No, no, Jesus is our Shepherd in quite a different manner, the only manner in which He could save the lost sheep. *He gave His life for us.* Thus He paid our debt and reconciled God. Thus He redeemed us from the power of death and the devil. This we Christians know and believe, and thereby we participate in His redemption; we are no longer lost men, but blessed children of God.

## 2.

A shepherd knows his sheep. He knows how to distinguish them from strange sheep, for he has marked them. Likewise the sheep know their shepherd. They follow him, for they know his voice. "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not his voice." So it is with men, when they are in a relation like that between sheep and shepherd. There is mutual knowing, and acquaintance between teacher and hearer, between magistrates and subjects, when their relation is as it should be. But all this is merely a faint image of that relation which obtains between Christ and His Christians, and by which He again proves Himself to be the Good Shepherd. *He knows His own.* Not all men are Christ's sheep. The Lord says to the Jews: "Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep." Everywhere there are many who do not belong to Christ's sheep. But likewise everywhere there are some who are Christ's sheep. And all these the Lord knows. We read in 2 Tim. 2, 19: "The foundation of God . . . that are His." On this the faith and hope of the Christians rests, that the Lord knows them. He unfailingly knows those who believe in Him and belong to His flock. He does not count any one among His flock by mistake, perhaps because he is found in the society of the Christians. Again, He overlooks no one, be he ever so humble and unworthy in the sight of men. He knows every one of the Christians, and knows his circumstances. He knows when and how each came into His flock, knows whether he is strong or weak in faith. He knows his sins, but also his repentance and amendment. He knows his enemies, his needs, and the dangers that beset him.

This is much, but it is not all. Jesus knows His own not only as He knows all things, according to His omniscience, but He says thus: "As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father." Of the relation between the Father and the Son we read John 17. There we learn that the Father loves the Son, and is loved by the Son. Thus we see, the Lord Jesus knows His sheep *in love*. Indeed, He gave His life for them. He not only knows that they are His sheep, but He has made them to be His sheep, and now embraces them, with all His love, as His precious own. And they know and believe that, and as such He knows them, and delights and takes pleasure in them. His heart beats in love for them. And now, should He be the almighty Lord of heaven and earth, and not care for His own? Indeed, that is a part of the knowing. For He says: "I am known of mine." Does that not mean: By His dealings He proves Himself to the sheep, so that by them they must know Him as their Good Shepherd? Assuredly. He sees their sins and their frailty, has patience with them, and does not cast them away on that account. He sees their trials and temptations, stands by them, and



gives them strength, that they may endure and overcome them. He sees their tribulations, and He is at their side to strengthen them, and governs all for their best. And even if they die, He sees to it that death does not conquer them. They shall not see death. Read what He Himself says about His mind and His doings with regard to His own. In Ps. 91, *e. g.*, we hear a child of God confessing how it knows its God and Savior. And then the Lord continues, speaking of His child: "Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore I will deliver him . . . and show him my salvation." In another place we read: "Is Ephraim my dear son? . . . saith the Lord," Jer. 31, 20. In short, the Lord Jesus knows His sheep with such tender, fervent love that it constantly urges Him to reveal Himself to them as their Savior and Shepherd.

Hence, also, their acquaintance is mutual, as the Lord says: "I am known of mine." Christians know the Lord Jesus. They do not know Him bodily, as one man knows another. Neither do they know Him by hearsay merely, as Christians in name and by mouth only know Him. They know Him as He, the Son, knows the Father. They love Him, and are attached to Him in love. Oh, the relation between Christ and His sheep is as tender as that between friend and friend, between bride and bridegroom, between parents and children. Christians stand in intimate relation to the Lord Jesus. They know that He has led them to His fold, and made them His sheep. They know that they can intrust everything to Him, and that they have to thank Him for all benefits received. We need but hear the prayers of the Christians, which prove how Christians know Jesus. The hymns they sing of Him also teach it, *e. g.*:

O Friend of souls, how blest am I

Whene'er Thy love my spirit calms!

Pray, is it not the blessed acquaintance of the sheep with its shepherd of which David sings? Do we not, in all this, perceive in Jesus the shepherd-mind and the shepherd-heart as it is expressed in Ezek. 34, 16: "I will seek that which was lost . . . that which was sick"? In which other religion is anything known of such tender, intimate relation between man and God? Where can such as are no Christians praise the shepherds and saviors chosen by themselves in like manner? They have none that does for them what Jesus has done for His sheep, and is still doing for them, none of whom they can say what David says of his Shepherd, none in whom they could put such trust and find such refuge, none whose love and faithfulness would make them happy. When their conscience assails them, in trouble and tribulation, in the terrors of death and judgment, they always stand alone and have no shepherd and savior that succors them.

O dear Christians, let us duly perceive what ineffable favors have been bestowed on us because Jesus is our Shepherd, and we are His sheep. Let us enjoy this grace. Against sin and the pangs of

conscience, in distress and embarrassment, in every tribulation, in the fear of death, at all times Jesus shall be our refuge, our comfort, and our hope. And since He has our welfare at heart, and we fare so well in His care, therefore let us hear His voice, let us shun the way of sin, and do nothing but what is well-pleasing to Him.

### 3.

However, the Lord, in our text, gives still another proof to show that He is the Good Shepherd. (v. 16.) What does Jesus mean to say by these words? The Jews were of the opinion, that children of Abraham, Israelites only, would enter the kingdom of the Messiah. The very thought that also the heathen should have part therein was abominable to them. But here the Lord tells them that He would extend His kingdom also to the other peoples of the earth, that He would gather His sheep also from them. They would then, together with the fold from among the Jews, form one flock, one congregation, or church. It is true, as in Israel not all believed in Him, so likewise not all heathen have become His sheep. But everywhere some were found who came, and such are still found who shall come in. And all these the Lord saw then already, with His spiritual eye, and knew them, and chose them to the end that they should be His sheep. In the text He already calls them all His sheep. But now they are dispersed all over the world, distant from the flock of Christ, and do not know their Shepherd. Therefore they must be brought back by God from their wandering and their apostasy, and must be gathered into the flock of Christ. But who provides for this? He, the Lord Jesus, does it. He says: "Them also must I bring." He *must* do it, because His love and His gracious counsel urge Him to do it. Indeed, lastly He proves Himself to be the Good Shepherd in this *that He brings the dispersed sheep to His fold.*

One might think this were brought about in a different way. The Christians see to it that the Gospel is preached in the world and to the unbelievers, and thus it is that others are still converted. But who has enjoined the Christians to preach the Word in the world? Is it not Christ that has said to them: "Go ye into all the world," etc.? (Mark 16, 15.) And is it not the Spirit of Christ that dwells in their heart, and makes them willing, and qualifies them for such work? It is entirely the affair of the Lord Jesus. And, indeed, if He were not present with the preaching, not a soul would be won by it. In the Gospel His own own voice is heard, and by it He seeks and finds the dispersed sheep, and brings them to His fold. Some think that not those alone are the godly who are called Christians and believe in the Gospel. Also in the world, among those who are without, you would find men that are honorable, lead an upright life, and do much good. That is true. Men may succeed, in a different manner, without the Gospel, to change their behavior, and



live uprightly. But thereby they are not converted inwardly, they have not become different internally. Their heart has not been turned to God. Thus they are still lost and wandering sheep. No, it is by the Gospel alone that the dispersed sheep are brought to the fold. In the Gospel Jesus reveals Himself to the sinners, reveals Himself as their Shepherd, who loves them, who gave His life for them, and redeemed them with a price. That conquers them; that gains their heart; that changes their mind so that they repent and believe in Jesus. In this manner He brings them to His flock.

How is it with you, my dear hearer? We have heard about the intimate acquaintance between Christ and His sheep. Does that cover your case? Is Jesus known to you in such a manner? Have you heartily repented, and do you now believe in Him? Do you pray to Him, do you think of Him and trust in Him? Or is all this unfamiliar to you? Do you know of Jesus by hearsay only, and have you formed no personal acquaintance with Him? It is not the Lord's will that you should remain in such condition and be lost. For He gave His life also for you. And now, to-day, you have heard His voice. O receive it into your heart! Return to Him, and let Him be your Shepherd and Savior! Then you are already added to His flock. Then you will not only have part in the happiness of Christ's sheep in this world, but you will also be with them when the Lord will lead His entire flock to the blissful pastures of eternal life. Amen.

C. C. S.; *tr.* by H. M.

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### Sermon on Rom. 1, 16.

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"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ"—if there was ever a man who could say that in truth it was the writer of these words, St. Paul, the apostle. True, there was a period in his life when he was not only ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, but was one of its most active persecutors, when he zealously sought and imprisoned all he could find who called on the name of Jesus. He was not ashamed to lend a helping hand at the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, though he was only a youth at the time. How relentlessly he breathed threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord! But what a complete reversal of character was effected in him by the converting grace of God! Ever after the day of his wonderful conversion on the way to Damascus he could truthfully say: "I am not ashamed," etc. He gloried in the Gospel. He devoted his life to the promulgation of the Gospel. He disputed with learned rabbis and with heathen philosophers, and these wise men of the world laughed him to scorn, because he defended such a silly thing as was, in their estimation, the Gospel of Christ the Crucified. At Athens, the metropolis of ancient intelligence and

culture, he proclaimed the Gospel to the educated Greeks, and they called him a babbler. At Caesarea, where he bore witness to the Gospel truth before King Agrippa and Governor Festus, the governor intimated that he did not have his right mind and called to him, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad!" But let kings and governors oppose; let learned men contradict; let scorn, reproach, ill-will, and persecution follow in his path—ever after the day of his conversion St. Paul was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Moreover, as his life clearly demonstrates, he *lived* for the Gospel, *worked* for the Gospel, *suffered* for the Gospel, *died* for the Gospel.

To this day it is the Gospel which inspires the Christians with zeal for the cause of the Lord. It is the Gospel which induces the Christians to erect magnificent edifices wherein they may worship their God. It is the Gospel that urges the Christians to carry on missionary work at home and abroad, and to establish benevolent institutions in all parts of the globe. Wherever the Gospel has found its way into the hearts of men, life and activity are visible. He who has received the Gospel into his heart feels that he has something glorious, something which is to be prized higher than all earthly goods, something which is not to be superseded by all the wisdom of the world. The Gospel which to the Jew is a stumbling block and to the Greek foolishness is to the Christian who has rightly conceived it something infinitely glorious. Let us, accordingly, basing our discourse on the noble avowal of St. Paul in our text, spend a few minutes in considering:

### THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL,

as we see it

1. *From the contents of the Gospel,*
2. *From the effect of the Gospel.*

#### 1.

We Christians know that the Bible reveals two *chief* doctrines, the Law and the Gospel. These are distinct doctrines that must not be intermingled with one another. Now, as we wish to consider the glory of the Gospel, it will help us considerably if, first of all, we look at the Law and hear what the Law has to say to us. What is the leading purpose of the Law? What does the Law reveal to us? Scripture says: "By the Law is the knowledge of sin." Here we have, as in a nutshell, a short summary of all the Law reveals to us. The Law teaches us that we are all sinners, that "there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not;" that "no good thing dwelleth within us;" that "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;" that we are corrupt from head to foot; that "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;" that we are "the children of wrath," living under the curse of God, and as such are fit only



to be cast into eternal condemnation for our wrongs. — In our times it is asserted by many that there is an innate power of good in man, which should be developed; that man is not by nature prone to evil, but that in every heart there is some tendency to good. St. Paul, however, certainly does not agree to that. In the same chapter from which our text is taken he describes man as he is by nature, and this is his description: "Being filled with all unrighteousness," etc., Rom. 1, 29—31. Does that sound as if natural man had an innate power of good dwelling within him? Certainly not! Woe unto mankind, therefore, if God had done nothing more than reveal His Law to us, telling us what we must do and what we must leave undone in order to please Him. Should we not have to cry out with the psalmist: "Lord, if Thou shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

But glory be to God! For He has given us the Gospel also. And what are the contents of the Gospel? We read in our text: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." "*Of Christ*" — in these two words we have the contents of the Gospel. The Gospel — which means glad tidings — is the good news of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. It tells us of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who became man and dwelt among the fallen human race to redeem lost mankind. The Gospel reveals what God in His infinite love has done for us poor lost and condemned creatures. Oh, who can conceive the glory of the Gospel? Consider, we are all, without exception, sinners; we are all by nature enemies of our God; we are conceived and born in sin; we sin daily; and by our many transgressions we have provoked our Almighty Creator. But how does He deal with us? Does He turn away from us in His wrath? Does He leave us to the terrible doom which is certain to follow our wickedness? Does He deal with us according to our deserts? No! The Gospel, the glorious Gospel, informs us that He has, instead, given us Christ Jesus, His own dear Son, that He might atone for our transgressions, and that everyone that believeth in Him might be saved. Already in Eden God the Lord promised that His Son should come to seek and to save that which was lost. And when the fullness of time was come, God made true His promise. That is the specific difference between the Law and the Gospel. The Law *demand*s and *command*s — the Gospel *promises* and *gives*. It is wrong to say, the Gospel *command*s this or that — as some say, the Gospel *command*s that we should lead a moral life, or a life which is in conformity with the will of God. The Gospel *command*s nothing. *Commandments* pertain to the Law. The Gospel only offers, presents, conveys, yea, gives Christ to the sinner.

And we must note that Christ Himself is really the contents of the Gospel. The Gospel does not only point out the way to Christ. It does not say that we must pray for grace and implore mercy until we feel a response in our heart saying, Now I have won! Now

Christ is mine! The Gospel contains Jesus Christ Himself. The very moment that a person receives the Gospel he receives Christ. The moment a man has heard the Gospel proclaimed and the Holy Spirit has entered his heart through the Word; the moment his heart is touched by the Gospel message, by the exceedingly great love of God to him, also, as it is made manifest in the Savior; the moment the desire is thus kindled within him to be a child of God, and his heart gives vent to the longing appeal: Oh, that I were a true believer!—in that moment Christ *is his* already. Christ has taken up His abode within him, he has become a true believer, though his faith still be weak. The Lord Jesus Himself distinctly says: “Without me ye can do nothing,” *i. e.*, nothing in a spiritual way. Not a jot can a man do towards his own conversion in his natural state. Without Jesus you can not even have as much as a desire to believe. Already the desire to believe is a mark of faith, and through it the entire contents of the Gospel have been made yours, *i. e.*, Christ Jesus Himself, and with Christ *all* that He has gained for man by His suffering and death, which is no less than the forgiveness of sin, life, and eternal salvation.

## 2.

For the apostle says: “I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, *for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*” In this description every word is significant and tends to set forth the glory of the Gospel in its beneficent effect.

Here in our text St. Paul does not speak of the Gospel as a mere saying or doctrine. He calls it a *power*. And it certainly is a power, a power which defies the world, the devil, and all the legions of hell. It is not an ineffectual word, like the sayings of men. On the contrary, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: “The Word of God is quick and powerful,” etc. (4, 12.) Look at the universal and powerful opposition with which the Gospel always has had to, and still must, contend—in its early days with the mighty powers of this world and in the present age of so-called enlightenment with atheism, infidelity, indifferentism, higher criticism, and the like. Why is it that the Gospel has outlived all its opponents; that the united efforts of the enemies of Christ have been unsuccessful in overthrowing the Gospel; that the Gospel has been victorious; that the Gospel has conquered heathenism, has changed barbarism into civilization, has brought about revolutions on social and ethical grounds which seemed an utter impossibility? Why is it that the Gospel at times seizes upon men so that they yield to its influence and acknowledge its truth? How is it to be explained that the very hearts of men who were sunk in the depths of vice are so changed by the Gospel that they are drawn from the mire of vice and begin to show love to God and their neighbor? It is because the Gospel is not an ineffectual thing, but a *power*.



And the apostle says: "*A power of God,*" a divine power, a power in which God Himself is active. The Gospel is not made effective by the way it is presented to men. A great many people are of the opinion that if the Gospel comes from the lips of some great pulpit orator, or if its truths are presented to men in eloquent terms and flowery language, it will be far more effective than if proclaimed by a plain speaker in very simple words. That is a delusion. Has human eloquence anything to do with the power of the Gospel? Indeed, it is not man's power that makes the Gospel effective. It is God's power, even as it was not the power of eloquence in Peter which brought about the conversion of the three thousand souls on the first day of Pentecost, but the power of God in and through Peter. Therefore St. Paul also wrote to the Corinthians: "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not," etc. (I, 2, 1—5.)

And what is the aim and end of this power of God? The apostle tells us in unambiguous words what it is. He says: "It is the power of God *unto salvation.*" The purpose of the Gospel is to save us, save us from eternal death. To effect this purpose the Son of God left the glory of the Eternal and descended into the misery and weariness of a life on earth. For this purpose He suffered the assaults of the Tempter, passed through Gethsemane, and bore with patience the lingering torments of the cross. For this purpose He performed the great work of our redemption. The Gospel brings to us this salvation, which Christ has gained: forgiveness of sin, deliverance from hell-fire. The Gospel not only announces this salvation in all its length, breadth, fullness, and glory, but it is also itself the instrument of God conveying this salvation to us. In vain do people seek for any other way to salvation than by the Gospel. There is no other power, there are no other agencies to lead us to eternal bliss. Jesus alone, who is the contents of the Gospel, is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," and "no man cometh to the Father but by Him." "Neither is there salvation," etc. (Acts 4, 12.)

Finally the apostle says: "*To every one that believeth.*" Though the Gospel is intended for all men, inasmuch as Christ is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world," and "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world," still the number of those who are actually saved must be limited to such as believe. Could it be otherwise? God does not deal with man as if he were some inanimate creature. God deals with men as rational beings. A person that does not believe the Gospel, who flatly refuses to accept the glorious things the Gospel offers him: forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation, I ask, Can he put the blame on God when in hell and torments his eyes shall be opened at last and, like the rich man in the parable, he will perceive his folly? Must he not blame himself alone? Has not God desired to save him also, as He "would not that any should perish, but that *all*

should come to the knowledge of the truth"? Has not God sent Jesus into the world for him also? Has not God offered him salvation in the Gospel? But he simply would not accept God's salvation.

Blessed, however, is he that believeth! Faith alone is indispensable! Oh, what a glorious Gospel! It is not required of us to do certain good deeds, to sacrifice property and goods, etc., in order to obtain the salvation which God has prepared for us in Christ Jesus. Salvation is a free gift of God offered to all without respect to social condition, whether rich or poor, without regard to language or tongue, as we read in the Book of Revelations: "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people"—in short, to everyone. All that we must do is to accept it from God, to take it, to make it our own. That is done by faith. Faith is the hand which receives from God the salvation offered in the Gospel. However, we must not forget that faith is not a meritorious work on the part of man—it is God's work in us through the glorious Gospel.

O let us not be ashamed, then, of the Gospel of Christ, for it is in truth "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Let us lose no opportunity in confessing and commending this glorious Gospel to the acceptance of men. Let us hold fast to it as our dearest treasure in this wicked world. And when we have arrived at the end of our earthly pilgrimage, our faith will be changed into sight, we will receive the crown of life, and live in the presence of our Father in heaven, singing praises to Him forever and ever. Amen.

L. J. S.

## Sermon on the Epistle for the Second Sunday after Easter.

1 PET. 2, 21—25.

The Gospel and Epistle lesson of to-day form a beautiful combination, for they both treat of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and His sheep, the Christians.

The Gospel lesson, upon which our forenoon discourse was based, begins with the words: "I am the Good Shepherd." Christ Himself calls the attention of His hearers to the fact that He is the only Good Shepherd, who can preserve His sheep from the jaws of the hellish wolf and lead them safely on to their eternal fold in heaven. And He shows why He is that Good Shepherd. He says, in the first place, that He knows His sheep and is known of them. That, surely, is a true sign: every good shepherd knows his sheep, and his sheep know him, too, know his voice from anybody else's, and follow it. Christ knows His sheep; being omniscient He knows who believes in Him, for He can look into the heart. And His sheep know Him, too; they know His voice; they detect immediately whether Christ's Word or human fiction is put before them. And they only follow His Word. Christ, furthermore, says that He is the Good Shepherd



because He laid down His life for His sheep. And truly, he must be a good and faithful shepherd who is willing to sacrifice his own life, in order that his sheep may escape the jaws of the wolf. Christ has done this. On the cross He died for His sheep. The hellish wolf slew Him, the Shepherd, and thus He rescued His sheep from his power. For His death, as we heard on Good Friday, was an atonement for our sins, and by it, therefore, the devil lost his power over sinners and his claims upon them.

Thus our Gospel lesson describes Christ, our Good Shepherd. The same idea underlies our Epistle lesson. It winds up with the words: "For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." In the foregoing verses Peter had shown that Christ is this Shepherd of our souls because He laid down His life for us. For thus he says vv. 21—24: "For even hereunto ye were called, because Christ also suffered for us," etc. And after this description of Christ the Good Shepherd's suffering and death, he closes with the remark: "For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

It is to these last words of our text that I would now invite your attention. They teach us that man is, naturally, a stray sheep and must be brought to Christ, the Shepherd of his soul; in other words, that the sinner must be converted before he can be saved. Hence—

### THE CONVERSION OF THE SINNER

shall be the subject of our discourse. We consider,

1. *The necessity of conversion;*
2. *The manner of conversion.*

#### 1.

"For ye were as sheep going astray," says the apostle to the Christians to whom his epistle was directed. He is referring to the time before they had become Christians. And, my hearers, these words apply to all men alike: all men, before they have become Christians, in their natural state, are as sheep going astray, astray from the fold and from the pasture and from the care of their heavenly Shepherd, astray into sin and godlessness, running helplessly into the jaws of the hellish wolf who is waiting for them, in order to devour them, to drag them into everlasting perdition. And therefore they must all be brought back to their Shepherd and His flock if they should escape from the wolf, for alone Christ, their almighty Shepherd, is able to protect them against him.

Alas! my hearers, all men naturally go astray from the way leading to heaven! Alas that it should be thus! Alas that man has departed from the way marked out before him by his Creator, and which originally he followed! How happy man would be if he had not forfeited the divine image with which he had originally been endowed, if he had remained in the state of perfect holiness and righteousness wherein God had placed him at the beginning. What bliss it must have been that Adam and Eve enjoyed when they were still pure and untainted by sin, when they walked in the ways of God and held communion with their heavenly Shepherd, as children

with their father, when He pastured them upon the fields of perfect happiness, unmarred by any troubles or cares, when they were under His protection, so that no evil could touch them!

But alas! Man did not remain in that blissful state. He fell. He willfully strayed away from the pastures of life, from the care and protection of his divine Shepherd, and in consequence of this all men now, naturally, go astray from the way of life. All men now wander about as lost sheep in the wilderness of sin and iniquity, falling an easy prey to the wolf that is eager to destroy their souls. Yes, every man, not a single one excepted, is in this same predicament. "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way,*" says the Prophet Isaiah (ch. 53). We all are naturally born sinful, bringing a depraved nature with us into the world, and hence from the first moment of our life we go astray and follow our own way, which necessarily leads to perdition. Not only the profligate and vicious, therefore, not only the outlaws and criminals, are stray sheep who by their vile deeds exclude themselves from heaven; nay, every man naturally goes the wrong way, though in his external conversation he be irreproachable, yea, though he be a pattern of uprightness and virtue. Yes, hear it, ye haughty and self-righteous, who vainly imagine that ye are walking straightway to the gate of heaven on the path of probity and virtue, you are on the wrong way, you are stray sheep, you are running directly into the open gates of hell!

Ah! that is the ultimate result of the fact that all men go astray from the way of life: if they do not return, if they are not converted, they must, finally, be inevitably lost. Already here in this life they forfeit a great deal by thus going astray. They go astray, in the first place, from the pasture, and they therefore miss the food and drink which they would enjoy there. Ah, that spiritual pasture, where our great Shepherd feeds the souls of His sheep, is the divine Word. That is what the psalmist means when he says: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters." This divine Word quenches the hunger and thirst of our soul for eternal bliss in the world to come by teaching us the way of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus; it affords us comfort and strength in all the trials and troubles of life by assuring us that these will all be compensated a thousandfold by the glory that is in store for us. And all this the sinner forfeits who is going his own way, who has strayed away, like a sheep from the pasture. In vain he seeks meat and drink for his hungry soul by attempting to find a way of his own to heaven. His conscience tells him that he never can get there, that he must be lost.

And then, too, the sinner strays away from the care and protection of his Shepherd. Ah, this Shepherd of our souls is almighty, and nobody, no devil, yea, not the entire host of devils, can harm us while we remain under His care. He has said of Himself: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." But alas! the sinner, who, like a sheep, naturally goes astray, runs away from the care of his Shepherd, deprives himself of His protection and exposes



himself to the teeth of the hellish wolf, who is only too eager to devour him, and against whose guiles and strength man is utterly powerless.

Summing up briefly what has been said, we have learned this: All men, naturally, go astray and walk their own ways; they leave the pasture, leave the care and protection of their heavenly Shepherd, and if left to themselves, must perish. Hence the conclusion necessarily following from these facts is this: If man is to escape perdition and to be saved, he must be brought back to his Shepherd and His pasture; in other words: all these facts teach us the necessity of the sinner's conversion.

## 2.

It remains to show the manner of this conversion. "For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." The latter portion of these words indicate the manner in which the conversion is effected. Mark, the apostle does not say, Ye have returned, but, Ye are returned, the meaning being, Ye have been made to return, have been brought back to your Shepherd; or we might circumscribe it by the phrase, You have been converted. That was the way in which they had become Christians, that was the manner of their conversion. And that, my friends, is the way in which the conversion of every sinner is effected: he must be converted.

For the sinner cannot convert himself. The stray sheep cannot find its way back to the fold; as a rule, the more it runs about in search after it, the farther it only strays away from it. And the same holds true with regard to the sinner: if he does try at all to go to heaven, if he does not harden his heart in vice and disbelief, nor willfully plunges himself into perdition, but if he does try to go to heaven, he is sure to look for all kinds of wrong ways that he thinks will take him there, but never for the right one. He will invariably try to get there by his own exertion, in some way or other. And the farther he has gone on his self-chosen way and the more he has become infatuated with it, the farther he strays away from the right way, the harder it becomes to bring him back to the right way. Nay, my friends, no virtue, no education, no refinement, brings a person closer to Christ; it only takes him farther away from Him. As a rule, it is much easier to convert a dissolute, degraded person, who can see his own unworthiness, than a person that prides himself upon his virtue and refinement and education, who either considers himself good enough for heaven, or scorns the idea that there is a heaven, claiming all those things to have been long ago disproved by science. No sinner has ever converted himself, nor can any sinner do it. "No man can come to me," says Christ Himself, "except the Father which hath sent me draw him." That, surely, is plain enough: no man can come to Christ of his own free choice and by his own strength, but he must be drawn to Him. Again, the Scriptures describe man in his natural state as being "dead in trespasses and sins." If man is spiritually dead, he can surely not raise himself to spiritual life. Nay, man cannot convert himself; he cannot even assist in his conversion; he can do nothing towards being converted and being brought to Christ.

The sinner must be converted. And he that does it, he that works his conversion, is God. God alone can do it and therefore must do it. No learning, culture, legislation, nor force can do it. God can do it; for He is almighty. Queer though it may sound, it is nevertheless true that the conversion of a sinner requires an almighty power. The Scriptures themselves say so. Thus we read Col. 2, 12: "Ye are risen" (from spiritual death to spiritual life, of course) "with Christ through the faith of the operation of God, who raised Him from the dead." And still more explicit the same apostle says Eph. 1, 19, 20: "We believe according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead." According to these passages the same almighty power that was requisite to raise Christ from bodily death is necessary to raise the sinner from spiritual death, to work faith in a man's heart, to convert him.

If an almighty power is necessary to convert the sinner, then only God, of course, is able to do it. And He does it, does it all alone, without man's help or assistance. "Ye are risen through the faith of the operation of God," was one of the passages we heard just now that go to prove this. Again St. Paul says Phil. 2, 13: "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." And again we heard in the other passage before quoted: "We believe according to the working of God's mighty power." And Christ Himself says, as we heard a little while ago, that no sinner could come to Him, except the Father draw him. Indeed, already in the Old Testament the Prophet Jeremiah prays (31, 18): "Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned; for Thou art the Lord, my God." Do these passages satisfy you? If not, I do not see what could, for if it is possible to express anything in human language so that it cannot be misunderstood, then here in these Bible passages it is expressed undeniably and unquestionably that man's conversion is wrought by God and by God alone, without the slightest assistance on the part of man.

This is what our text teaches concerning the conversion of man, and which all the rest of the Scripture corroborates: The sinner cannot convert himself; however, he must be converted; it is God alone that works his conversion. How God does it, by which means He kindles the flame of faith in the sinner's heart, has been shown at various other occasions: the Word and the sacraments are the means of grace through which He offers us salvation and, at the same time, gives us strength to accept salvation through which, in other words, He operates upon the heart of man and works faith in the same. We might sum up what has been said in the second part in the beautiful words of Luther, at the beginning of his explanation of the Third Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

It is my sincere hope and prayer, my dear hearers, that with each and every one of you the words of our text may hold good: "Ye were," but are no longer, "as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." Amen. G. L.